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ABSTRACT

Most of the "talk" about the role of mass media in the Third World is generated by politicians rather than by professional communicators. The "Developmental Play Model" treats media experience as an encounter with the "self" and considers the "self" as an integral part of the mass communication process. The Developmental Play Model calls for separation of communication from information, of opinion from fact. Development is measured in terms of the growth of the self and therefore deals with matters of self-image, motivation, pleasure, and the creation of, and pride in, culture. Information processing in this model is a phase that precedes attitude formation. The process starts at the psychological level, moves to the social level, and ends at the physical level. The Developmental Play Model consists of two major stages: one that shows how the process starts at the psychological reality level and one that probes the motivational process. A major difference between this model and the dominant linear models is that the former takes attitudes as its principal component while the latter takes information or messages as its principal component. The major contribution of this model is its attempt to solve the problem of motivation, by using local culture as a principal motivator to media exposure, rather than by importing foreign cultures. (Four figures and 12 notes are included, and 28 references are attached.) (MS)

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DEVELOPMENTAL PLAY:

A NEW APPROACH TO THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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DEVELOPMENTAL PLAY: A NEW APPROACH TO THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Introduction

Communication theory has concerned itself with how mass media influence the attitudes, beliefs and actions of people. Thus, mass media generally are seen as crucial to any effort aimed at social, economic and political change. However, in the Third World the argument about the importance of the mass media is so loud that the media seem to belong to political exploitation rather than to thorough professional thought. Most of the "talk" about the role of mass media in the Third World is generated by politicians rather than by professional communicators.

Theories in this area generally portray mass media as agents of persuasion rather than agents of entertainment. Much emphasis is put on the source's intention and the content of the message. Hence, many studies have dealt with media as mobilizers, or as agents for the diffusion of innovations.

The early tradition in mass communication research, particularly in the West, emphasized "sources" and "messages" at the expense of gaining understanding about the nature of "audiences." Although that shortcoming has been overcome in the West, studies about audiences in the Third World remain scarce.

Many theories of media in the Third World look at audiences as if they are composed of inert individuals who subject themselves to a deterministic process of media exposure. This resulted, in part, from the assumption that Third World cultures are ahistoric and static. Even if cultures of the Third World were like that, the communication process should not be conceived of as a deterministic process where the "sources" have a monopoly over the effects. The studies carried out under the banner of "Uses and Gratifications" have solved part of this problem in the Western context. However, new methodologies and factors should be taken into consideration to draw a more complete picture of media effects.

The present study attempts to make the picture more complete by building a new model for communication that considers the "self" as an integral part of the mass communication process. Our "Developmental Play Model" treats media experience as an encounter with the "self," even in the case of imaginative experiences normally classified as "escapist" activities. It also submits that arousal, excitement, fear and the like, which have been considered in the Uses and Gratification tradition as motivations for media experience, are better considered as means for the gratification of the broader need for self-enhancement. Likewise, orientation, surveillance, and the like--usually considered motivations for seeking

media cognitive experience--are better considered as means for the gratification of the broader need for self-worth.

This model resulted from a study the authors conducted in Sudan that probed the audiences' attitudes about the role of television. The full results of the study will be presented in a future paper. The purpose of the present paper is to discuss the theoretical model that we developed therefrom.

Literature Review

Most of the existing literature on the role of mass media in developing countries dwells on the concepts of propaganda, press freedom, government ownership and control, and media as mobility agents for national development. Little attention has been paid to audiences' attitudes toward media. A brief overview of related literature--the role of media in national development, uses and gratifications theory, Stephenson's Play Theory and Rogers and Kincaid's Convergence Model--will set the stage for the presentation of our Developmental Play Model.

Media and National Development

The purpose of this branch of communication theory is to study how mass media affect national development. It is generally believed that the mass media can affect development and, indeed should. Early theoretical development in the field led to general agreement that national development involved a change from

"traditional" society to "advanced" or "modern" society; that is, "...static, agricultural, primitive, rigidly ascriptive societies to dynamic, industrialized, urbanized, rational, socially mobile nation-states."[1]

"Modernization" was considered to be the "... total transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and associated social organizations that characterize the advanced, economically prosperous and relatively politically stable nations of the Western world."[2] Thus, a general approach used to determine a country's location on a modernization continuum was to compare it, by various indices, to a Western role model. Although such an approach is clearly ethnocentric, it nonetheless has been pursued frequently and has profoundly affected theoretical development.

Golding[3] devised a three-way categorization system to describe the major communication theory approaches to national development. The <u>index</u> approach posits that certain demographic or economic variables (e.g., literacy rates, number of newspapers, per capita GNP) are highly correlated with "progress," thereby serving as indices the researcher can use to place the country on a modernization continuum. Underlying this approach is the concept that the nation can be made modern by the acquisition of the proper resources.

The differentiation approach holds that societies become more modern as (a) role specializations (particularly those

dealing with work and the production of goods and services) increase and (b) "new values" appropriate to the new division of labor appear.

The exogenously induced change approach suggests that development occurs because of outside influences (i.e., from modernized societies) in the form of resources, technical knowledge and ideas.

Uses and Gratifications

Historically, communication theorists have tended to concentrate on what media do to people, rather than what people do to (or with) the mass media. The perceptions held by audiences and the individual expectations created by mass media exposure have significant effects on the communication process.

The Uses and Gratifications tradition represents an approach to learning more about audiences. It recognizes the importance of individual differences in accounting for the audience experience. Indeed, McQuail[4] recently has started using a motive or a satisfaction as an intervening variable in its own right. This view was encouraged by an accumulation of evidence that indicated that audience reactions were always selective in systematic ways.

The rise of television has increased the demand for research into audiences that would go beyond head-counting and pure market forces concerns. This could be considered a step that goes

beyond the collection of "ratings" and toward the understanding of the long-term effects of mass media.

However, the Uses and Gratification tradition submits that what is central to mass communication is not message-making or sending, and not even the messages themselves, but the choice, reception and manner of response of the audience. Indeed, one of the main components of this tradition is the idea of audience activity.

McQuail (1984) suggests a new model for Uses and Gratification that involves a radical departure from the dominant model. His approach considers the consumption of culture as an end in itself. Attention is thus concentrated on the making of choices and on the meaningful encounter with cultural products. "This approach emphasizes the point that whenever we are 'caught-up' or captured in a drama or the like we are, by definition, also cut-off, not only from the constraints of the moment and less interesting reality, but also from our own past and future."[5]

This is often part of the conscious purpose and pleasure of exposure to cultural experience. In McQuail's view, audience "activity" is an act of self-liberation, however temporary, from everyday surroundings.

McQuail also submits that a general inclination to seek cultural experience precedes actual involvement. Thus in his cultural model[6] he takes "general expectation of involvement" as a major motivation that would be satisfied by an imaginative

experience of excitement, arousal, sadness. Likewise, in his cognitive model, McQuail takes "general interest/curiosity" as a motivation that would be satisfied by an experience of benefit or use such as guidance, surveillance or application.

Play Theory of Communication

In Stephenson's Play Theory,[7] mass communication, drama and the like are seen as serving the needs of sociability and self-existence. However, Stephenson defines the self as "overtly attitudinal," which, we will see, makes it an integral part of the communication process. The basic tenet of his Play Theory is that mass communications enable people to become involved in subjective play. A distinction is made between communication that is done for pleasure and communication that is done for work. Communication pleasure is communication done by choice for the enjoyment it provides. Communication pain is communication involving a (work) purpose (that is, communicating because one is required or expected to do so). The former is self-enhancing; the latter is self-negating. Most importantly for our present purposes, Stephenson suggests that the mass media may be particularly important in providing a means by which a society develops its culture.

Moreover, an important concept in Play Theory is the distinction between "social control" and "convergent selectivity." Social control concerns the stabilizing and

influence-wielding function of institutions--family, church, school--and is maintained and reinforced by social communication. Social control induces conformity, consensus and established custom. Convergent selectivity represents relative freedom from social control and is a means by which a person can create an opportunity to exist for himself.

Rogers' and Kincaid's Convergence Model

Special emphasis is put on Rogers and Kincaid's Convergence and Networks Analysis Model[8] for several reasons: first, because their criticisms[9] about the linear models are especially pertinent; second, because the model is similar to the authors' model in its components, although each is organized in a way that makes their results categorically different; and third, because it provides a valid analysis of the problem, although we think the model suffers from unsuccessfully defined principal components of the communication process.

Linear models, usually rooted in theories of electrical engineering, tend to place primary emphasis on "messages" as the fundamental elements of communication. The communication process is seen in terms of messages flowing from a point of origin (the sender) through some channel to a destination point (the receiver); that is, each message can be said to have not only a specific beginning and ending place but a beginning and ending time.

The result of this kind of thinking in the area of national development can be a general belief in an "information-in/action-out" type of model. This can lead to an assumption that producing changes by mechanical efforts in the developing person's physical world is more certain than using information to change his social world. This concept developed partially from a tendency to consider information as a physical entity that could be carried or transported from a "source" to a "receiver" in the same way a farmer might use a wagon to "deliver" bales of hay from farm to marketplace.

According to Rogers, this approach resulted in many biases, the most serious of which are a tendency to concentrate on the psychological effects on separate individuals rather than on the social effects "... and a belief in one-way mechanistic causation rather than the mutual causation that characterizes human information systems."[9]

In the convergence model, information serves a convergence function in communication. Form, difference, invariance and uncertainty are involved. Information gives the "substance" a "form" that makes it different from all other "forms." Communication is the translation of such a difference through an information circuit. From this they submit that: "(1) the creation of information occurs at a physical level of reality, (2) that interpretation occurs at the psychological level of reality, and (3) that perception bridges the physical and psycho-

logical levels of reality. Therefore, in this model information is created at the physical level, is processed at the psychological level and then becomes a social reality at the social level.

They would argue, of course, that communication in their model has neither a beginning nor an ending: only the mutually defining relationship among the parts gives meaning to the whole. They contend that the convergence model, through networks analysis could direct research toward holistic approaches instead of atomistic-mechanistic ones.

Rogers' criticism of the overemphasis in linear models on messages as the principal component of the communication process seems applicable to his use of "information" in his own model. Information as defined by Rogers is not much different from the "messages" defined in the linear models. Information as "difference" is nothing more than "bits of information" that have no shape or structure. Information inthe mind is not stored as "unprocessed" bits of information but, rather, as organized concourses. Even if information could exist in an unstructured form, this is not what communication is about.

What is at stake in communication is not "messages" as such but broad frames of preconceptions that have a direct effect on the processing of "information" and consequently on human behavior. The major concern is not with message systems that define for a person the realities or potentialities of the human

condition, or, in the terms of Rogers, the sharing of meaning, but the way a person confronts these and forms perspectives of existence, priorities, values and belief-systems. "Based on past experience, the individual develops interests, values, beliefs and the like, not as items of knowledge or information stored up in the memory, but as active systems which determine what the individual will perceive or react to or have fantasy about."[11].

Following Stephenson, our Developmental Play Model is based on attitudes rather than on information, and visualizes the audiences of mass media as active, participating members in the communication process.

Developmental Play Model

The Developmental Play Model calls for separation of communication from information, of opinion from fact. Communication in our model is interwoven with the "self." We think of the communication process as a game of racquetball, which contains many cycles or "serves." Although it is a cyclical, mutually causational process, communication is composed of an unlimited number of subcycles (episodes), each of which has a beginning and an ending. Development in our model is a state of mind. It is a context in which action occurs and has meaning. However, it is illusionary in the sense that it is not a cause of anything; it is merely a context in which the collective endeavor becomes a meaningful process.

"Development," particularly in linear models typically is defined as an increase in some material variable (e.g., per capita GNP, per capita theater seats). In the Developmental Play Model, development is measured in terms of the growth of the self. It deals, therefore, with matters of self-image, motivation, pleasure and the creation of, and pride in, culture.

In the Developmental Play Model, information processing is a stage that precedes attitude formation. The process starts at the psychological level, moves to the social level and ends at the physical level (see Figure 1).

Attitudes exist first at the individual level. They become shared through convergent selectivity, a process in which the self is free to choose from all alternatives (for example, to read this story instead of that one, or to watch television instead--without any guilt about what one "ought" to do). In the immediate experience of convergent selectivity there is a heightened self-awareness, a greater receptivity in the person. The individual is free to choose from all aspects available in culture. Convergent selectivity is the process by which we share dreams, hopes and fads. It is the process of sharing pleasure and pain as opposed to sharing information; of sharing "ourselves" rather than merely sharing "facts."

Stephenson defined "social control" as the stabilizing influence wielded by social institutions.[12] However, it seems more appropriate in our model to use "convergent control."

We define convergent control as the process by which social institutions dictate certain types of ideas and information considered necessary for the public good. It is accompanied, as is Stephenson's social control, by communication pain.

Thus, the Developmental Play Model has two parts:

*** the cultural model that takes convergent selectivity as its means of sharing attitudes and communication pleasure as the facilitator of the proliferation of such attitudes;

*** the cognitive model that takes convergent control as the means of sharing attitudes and communication pain as the facilitator of the internalization of such attitudes and information.

Although the cultural model and the cognitive model are not identical, they lead to the same final step of "achievement of goals," the objective of development (see Figures 1 and 2).

What is at stake in development is motivation and image-building. One of the most serious impediments to development is the relative absence of motivation and a lack of self-worth and self-pleasure. People in the Third World are not just in need of the "know-how" and capital; they also need motivation and the "know-why." These concerns lead to the creation of two motivational models: a motivational cultural model (see Figure 3) and a motivational cognitive model (see Figure 4). The two

models shown in Figures 1 and 2 set the general frame, which starts at the psychological level and leads to the achievement of goals at the physical level with the creation of social reality as a necessary condition if the process is to reach its goals. The motivation models form the channels through which the process works.

Convergent selectivity is the process by which attitudes become of the self. It is the first step toward making the self involved and active. The concern is not with attitudes as clusters of "meaning" or "information," but as dynamic preconceptions. They shape the tastes, hopes and dreams of the individual. Communication pleasure is the atmosphere that makes these attitudes sharable or, as put by Stephenson, "communicable." It is the process of creating common sense and common desirable experience. In other words, it is the creation of culture, defined as common taste.

The motivational cognitive model shown in Figure 4 takes attitudes as dynamic systems of preconceptions. Although they are defined by cognitive content, they gain their dynamic nature from the feelings of self-worth. The cognitive model takes convergent control as the process that makes significant information (e.g., laws, how/when to pay taxes, where to get medical aid) part of one's own attitudes. Communication-pain is the mechanism that facilitates the sharing of such information and the internalization of it at the individual level.

Communication-pain is the cement of social institutions.

Attitudes, in the cognitive model, are seen as shared information leading to mutual understanding, which in turn leads to mutual cooperation. (The possibility always exists, of course, that the sharing of attitudes can lead to misunderstandings and mistrust.)

The model gives special attention to "motivation" as one of the major problems in national development. We submit that efforts to motivate Third World people through communication often has failed because it dealt with people as entities devoid of "self"--as so many empty vessels waiting to be filled with information per se. The inclusion of the self as an integral part of the model necessarily incorporates motivation because the "self" cannot become involved unless there is a specific motivation (i.e., an incentive or expected satisfaction) present to activate it. Thus, the making of choices when done with self-involvement through convergent selectivity will make the consumption of culture a major motivation. In summary, communication pleasure can be a motivation for cultural consumption and a facilitating mechanism for the sharing of cultural content.

Therefore, the motivational cultural model takes the "general expectation of self-enhancement," (Figure 3) as manifest in the freedom from everyday life provided by the consumption of culture, as the major motivation in the cultural model. Self-

enhancement is produced, mainly, by the general sensation of freedom from the immediate constraints of daily life that is characteristic of communication pleasure.

However, the general expectation of self-enhancement is replaced by a general expectation of self-worth in the form of serving social, religious, educational and military institutions. Convergent selectivity is replaced by convergent control. The latter's set of prescribed social ideas and values are proliferated and internalized through communication pain rather than through communication pleasure. The satisfaction of guidance, surveillance and related purposes leads to mutual understanding at the social level. Even though mutual understanding could be brought about through mass media, other social institutions, such as schools, should take the responsibility for such a social goal. A society, therefore, has the difficult task of striking a balance between the constraints of social stability and the freedom of self-pleasing.

It should be remembered that all four models shown in Figures 1 to 4 are parts of one global unit we call the Developmental Play Model. Instead of attempting to visualize all four figures in one complex graphic model, it is easier to comprehend the overall model as consisting of two major stages: one that shows how the process starts at the psychological reality level (where attitudes are considered systems of a dynamic nature associated with convergent selectivity); and one

that probes the motivational process (in which self-enhancement and self-worth are seen as major motivations for the media exposure associated with convergent selectivity).

Conclusion

The Developmental Play Model is defined by four sub-models: two developmental communication models and two motivational models. The basic cultural model leads to the motivational cultural model and the basic cognitive model leads to the motivational cognitive model.

A major difference between the Developmental Play Model and the dominant linear models is that the former takes attitudes as its principal component while the latter takes information or messages as its principal component.

The model treats the audience's media experience as an encounter with the "self." The audience is thus defined as active, even in the case of imaginative experiences normally classified as "escapist" activities.

When the self is involved, motivation is granted. The general expectation of self-enhancement leads the audience to seek media exposure that will in turn lead to change or reinforcement of goals. These goals also would lead to a new cycle of media exposure.

Communication pleasure is a major facilitator of socialization and the sharing of attitudes. It could, therefore,

be a valuable asset for the proliferation of developmental values.

The consumption of culture is a goal in its own right. It is not a by-product. It is a genuine motivation that could be used to reproduce culture. Thus, mass media can be agents of cultural creation rather than merely agents of information diffusion.

The model is not entirely new, but it increases sensitivity to issues ignored by development communication researchers who tend to observe only the physical reality instead of wrestling with complicated psychological phenomena. The major contribution of this model is its proposition to solve the problem of motivation, not by importing ones from abroad, but by using local culture as a principal motivator to media exposure. In this light, arousal, excitement, sadness, wonder and the like, are moved from the motivation side to the satisfaction end.

Last, and not least, the approach to Third World societies as kingdoms of ants that never change, should be replaced by one that sees it as a human society that has a collective goal toward which all efforts are directed. Thus, a society so defined, will continuously change its conditions to meet the requirements needed to make the achievement of such a goal possible.

It is not too surprising that attempts to construct workable theories of communication's role in national development have met with so little success. The failure to define audiences as active participants in the communication process has been a

major, and frequent, oversight. The idea that Third World citizens easily can be manipulated through communication is not only reminiscent of naive theories of another era. it is ethnocentric and paternalistic. When it comes to development, there has been far too much seriousness and work (i.e., communication pain) and not nearly enough pleasure and play (communication pleasure); too much emphasis on what people must or should do and too little emphasis on letting them develop a sense of culture. The Developmental Play Theory is one effort to overcome the traditional shortcomings.

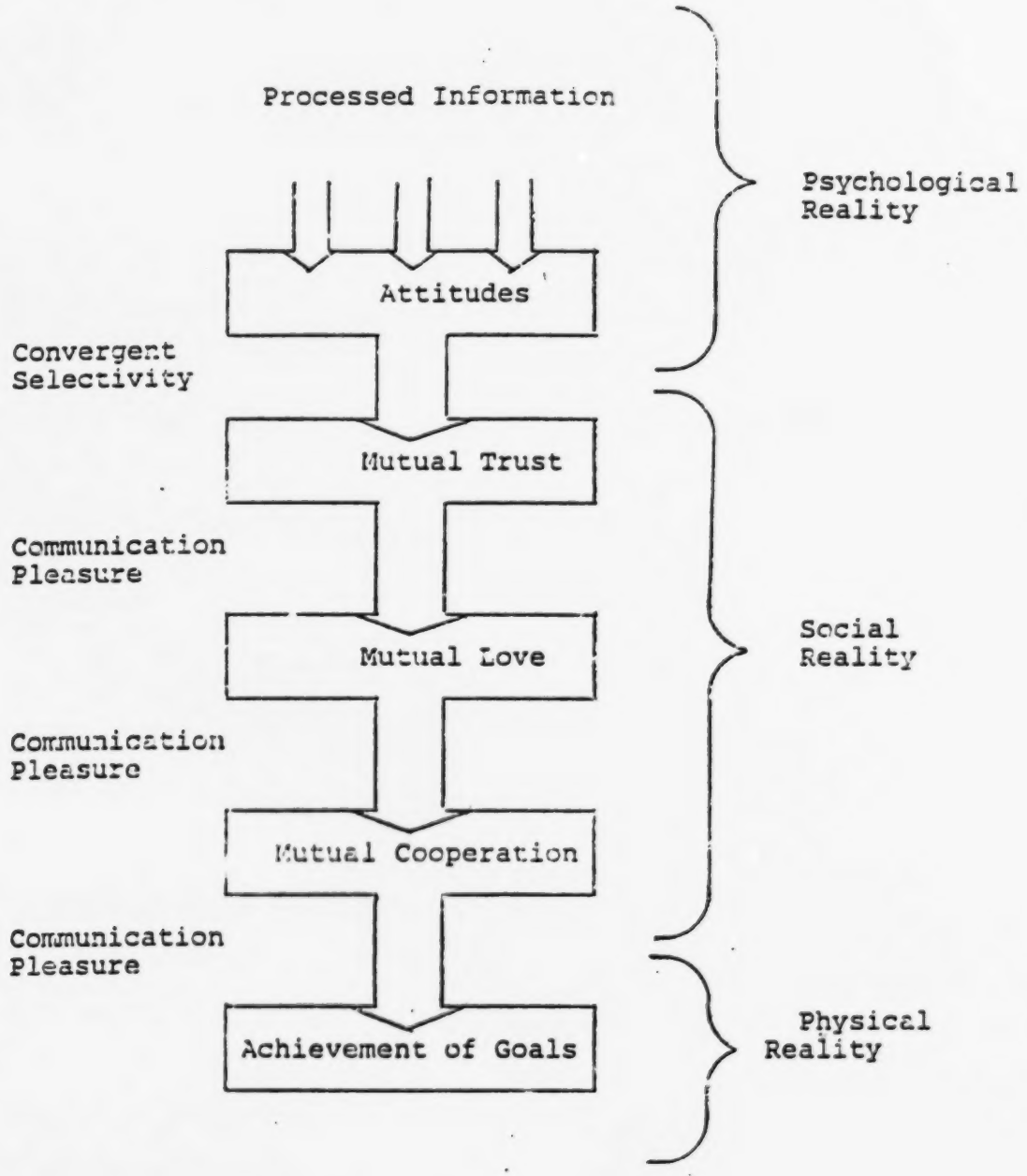

Figure 1. Cultural Model

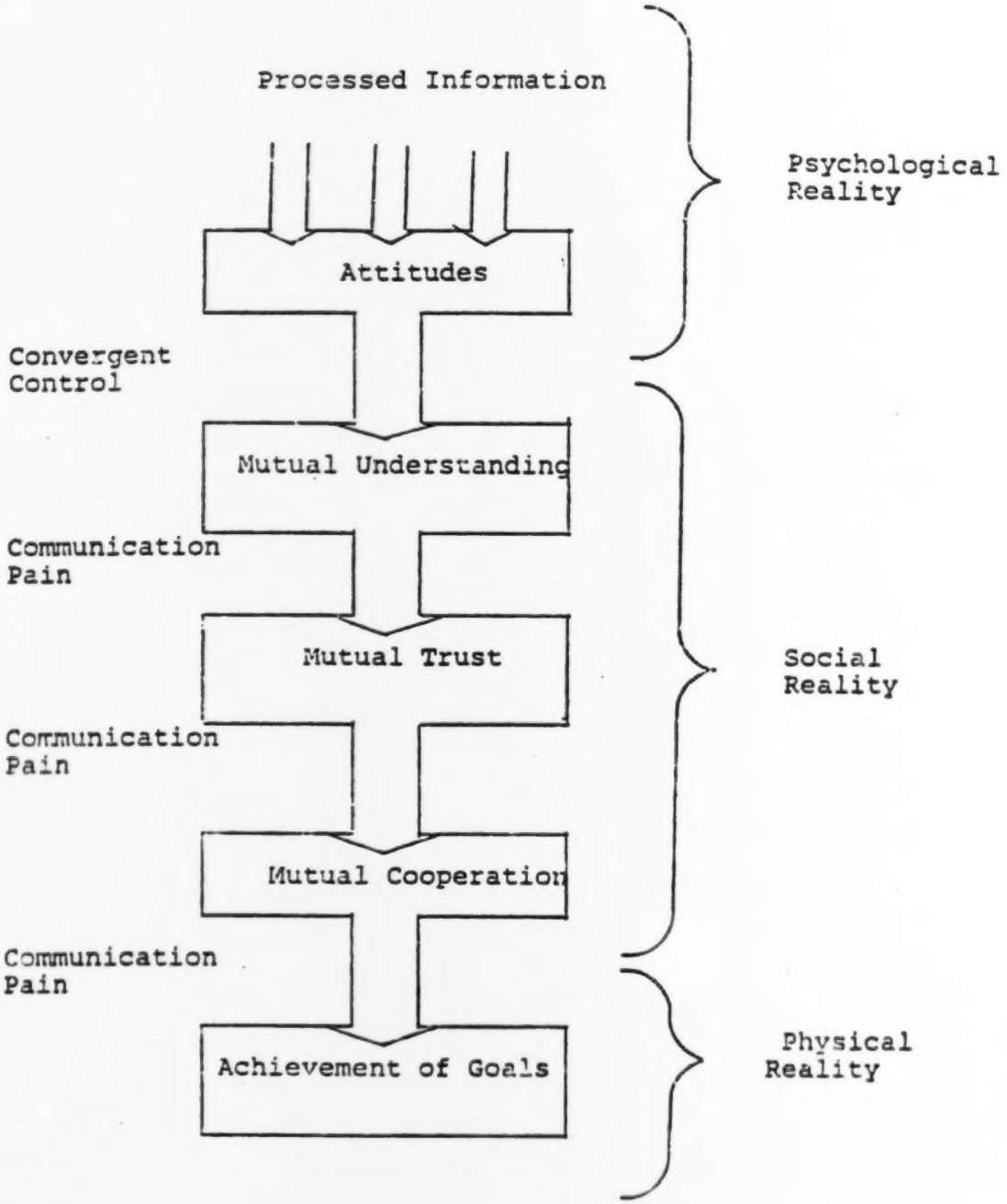

Figure 2. Cognitive Model

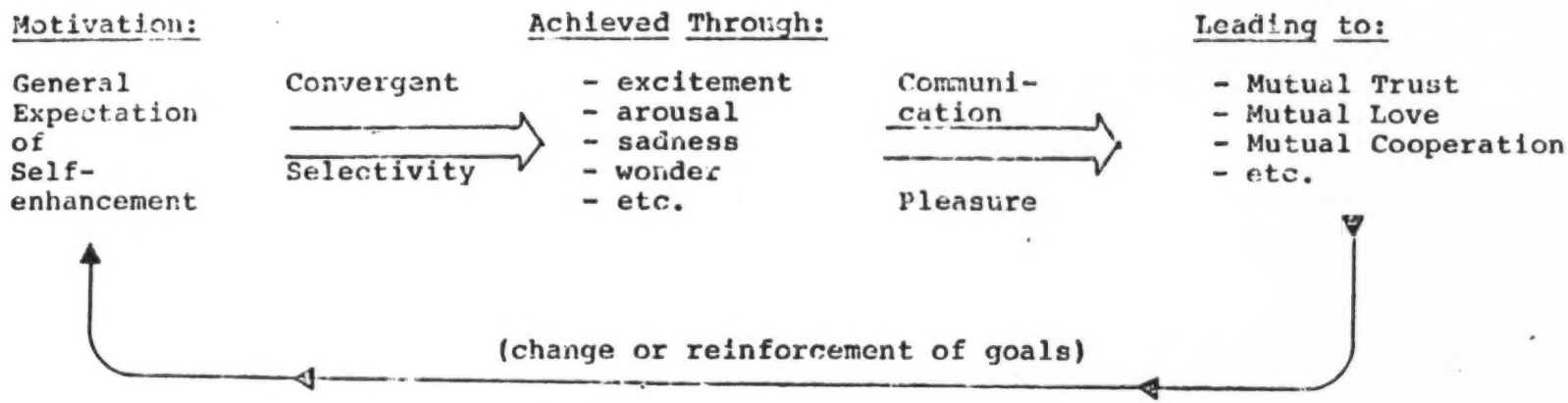

Figure 3. Motivational Cultural Model.

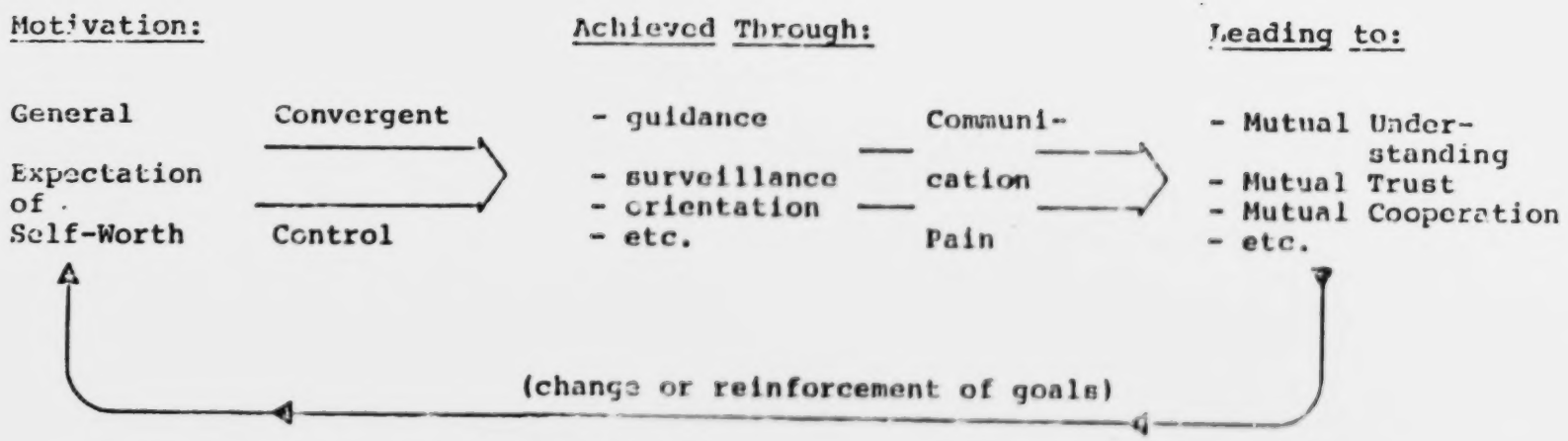

Figure 4. Motivational Cognitive Model.

ENDNOTES

1. Golding, Peter, "Media Role in National Development: Critique of a Theoretical Orthodoxy," Journal of Communication, 1974 (Summer), p. 39.

2. W.E. Moore, Social Change (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), quoted in Golding, Ibid.

3. Golding, Ibid., p. 40.

4. Denis McQuail, "With the Benefit of Hindsight: Reflections on Uses and Gratifications Research," Critical Studies in Mass Communication, Vol. 1, (June) 1984, pp. 177-193.

5. McQuail, Ibid.

6. McQuail, Ibid., p. 184.

7. Stephenson, William, The Play Theory of Mass Communication, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

8. Rogers, Everett and Kincaid, L., Communication Networks, Towards a New Paradigm for Research (New York: The Free Press, 1981).

9. Rogers, Ibid., p. 39.

10. Rogers, Ibid., p. 52.

11. Stephenson, Ibid., p. 5.

12. Stephenson, Ibid.

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